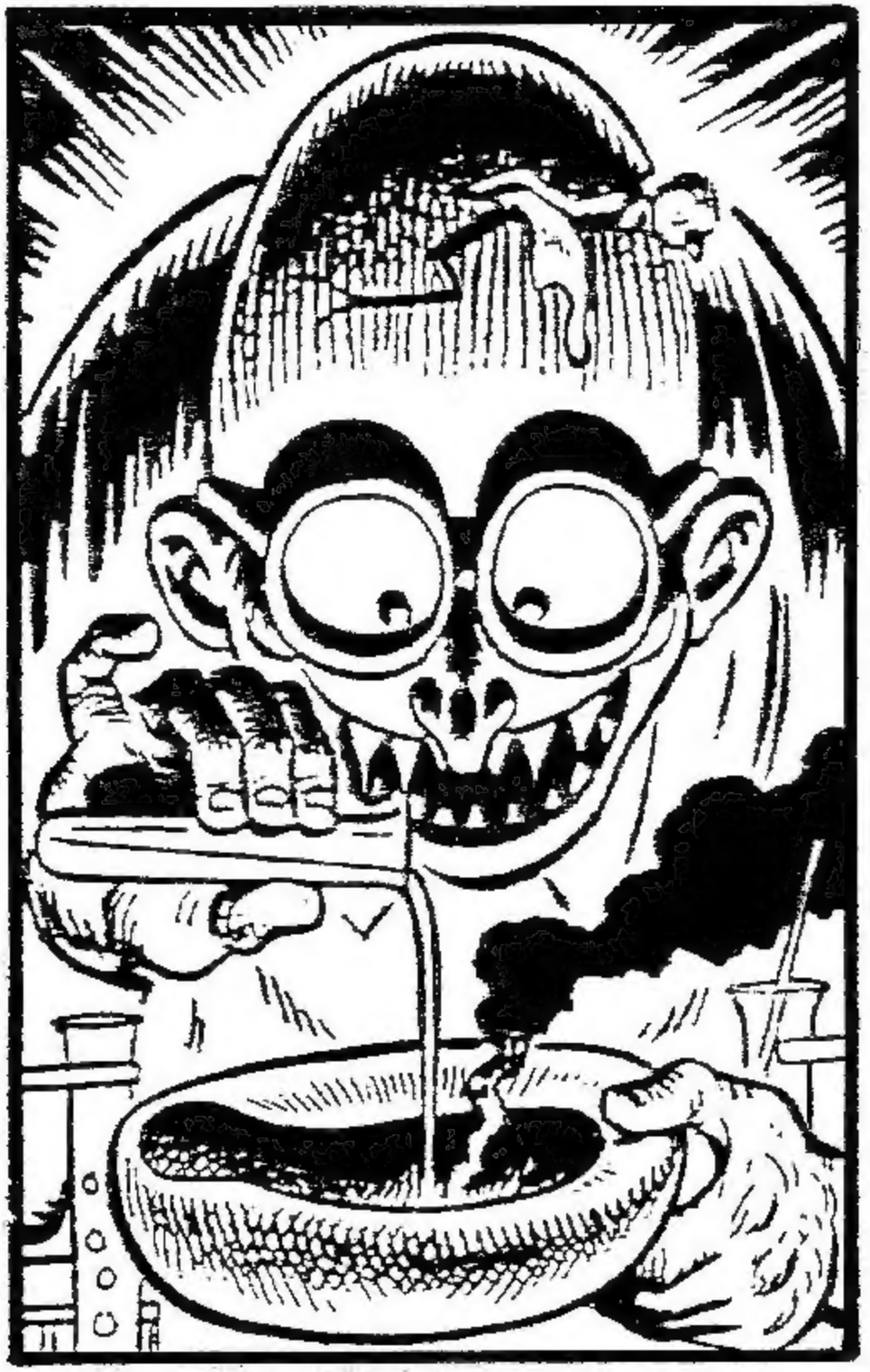
THAT THING! THAT SLITHERING FANZINE COMING TOWARD US! *WHAT IS IT?*

# IT'S MELVIN!

AN EC FANZINE



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"Willie was our number one cartoonist."
--H. Kurtzman

Will Elder in the New Trend

NUMBER 1 · SPRING 1995

**I HAD ONE GRUNCH...**

*It's Melvin!* began as an idea from discussions held on the Prodigy Service bulletin boards during 1993 and 1994. There was much talk of artists, especially those *Mad* artists of the comic book era.

It was also part of my on-going education to the appeal of *Mad* and its "usual gang of idiots." Frankly, Will Elder wasn't someone I had thought about all that much. If that sounds surprising, it's because in my mind he seemed submerged in the aura surrounding Kurtzman.

In April, 1994, sitting in a coffee shop in Berkeley, California, with my friends and fellow comics fans David Miller and Clay Geerdes, talking about *Mad*, which had been on my mind, Clay said: "Bill Elder was the most underrated cartoonist ever."

The simple truth of this statement struck me. Shortly after that I was able to complete my collection of the hardbound, slip-cased editions of the New Trend EC Comics with the addition of *The Complete Panic*. At last I was able to go through and re-read every story that Elder had drawn or worked on as an inker during his EC tenure.

What a pleasure! It was like I hadn't seen Elder before as others had. Eddie Hunter, one of those Prodigy bulletin board contributors, is an Elder fan, and had helped point me in the right direction.

The reading was terrific. The writing was tough. It's mostly opinion, as you may note. Since this is my magazine, I get to give my opinions!

I'd like to thank Harold May for his additions to the Elder Index, also found in this issue. If you find any omissions, please let me know.

**...BUT THE EGGPLANT...**

I love EC Comics, and I love *Mad*, the comic book. I decided to make Elder my focus for this issue because of my love of the early *Mad*. Right now I have no plans for further issues, but if I do any more, they may have *Mad* or other *Mad* artists as a main focus, although not necessarily. I think that because of the nature of EC, any articles which relate to them would conceivably be at home in a *Mad* fanzine.

**...OVER THERE.**

On the naming of *It's Melvin!:* As all we knowledgeable *Mad* fans know, "Melvin" was a name used a lot in jest by Kurtzman. Why did he find it funny? I dunno. Since my first name is "Parley" I don't make fun of other people's names. Lord knows I've been through it enough in my life.

In 1970 my wife and I spent a pleasant week with comics fan Tom Fagan at an estate in Rutland, Vermont. Oddly enough, this subject came up. Tom said, "Jerry Lewis used to make fun of the name Melvin. Maybe that's where Kurtzman got it. But Lewis went on TV and apologized for it, and Kurtzman never did apologize." I found it curious that Fagan would even mention it until I saw that his name was M. Thomson Fagan. Gee, I wonder what that "M" could have possibly stood for?

**IT'S MELVIN! #1** is published by Par Holman, 1097 E. Webster Drive, Sandy, UT 84094.

Additional copies are $2.00 US.

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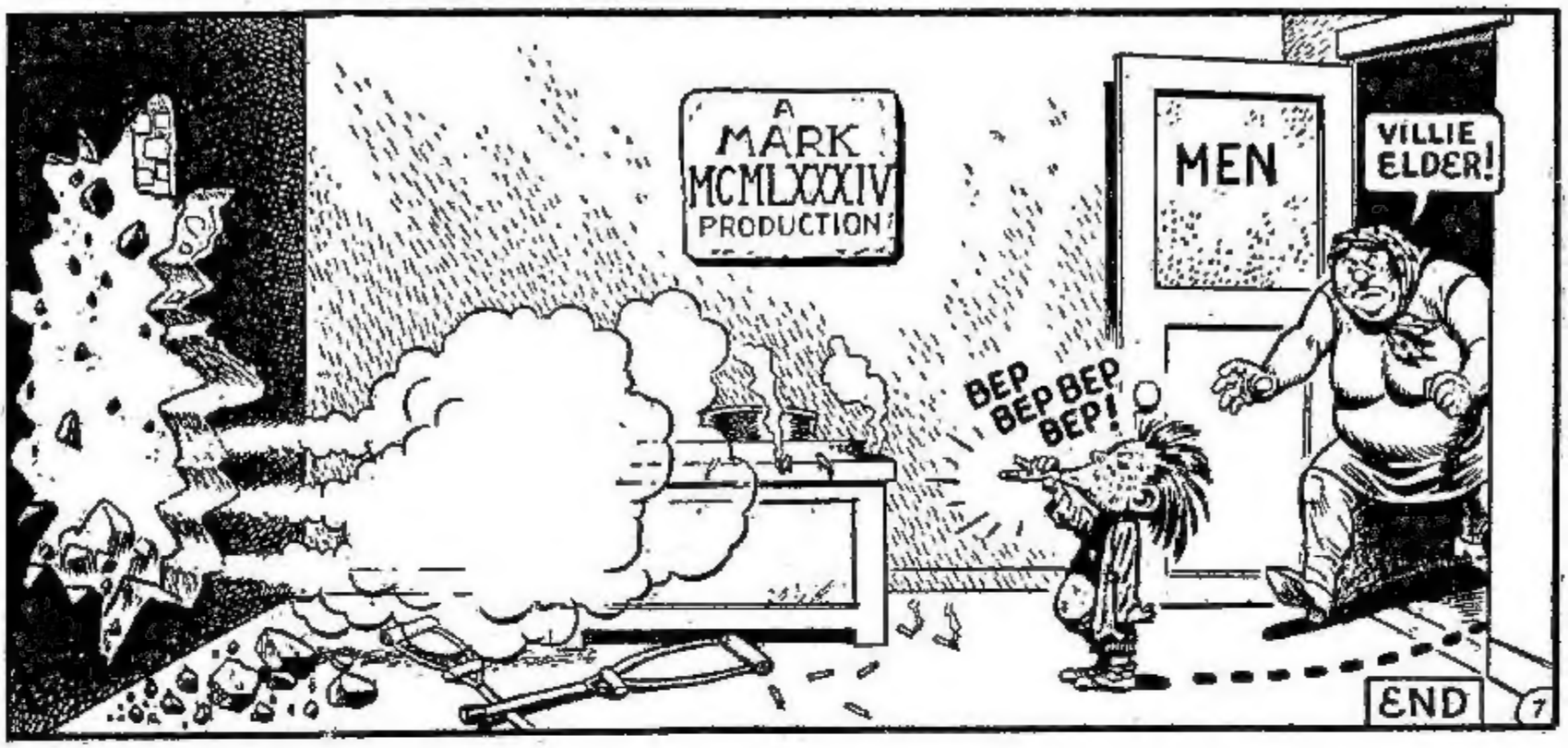
This issue is dedicated to Sally.




# Number One Cartoonist: Will Elder in the New Trend

by Par Holman

The birth of *Mad* in 1952 was a combination of luck and skill. It helped that there was an eccentric publisher to be the midwife, but the creative fathers are who we remember most:

Kurtzman, the dyed-in-the-wool comics genius, renaissance man in four-colors, with a combination of cartooning and writing skills to more than match the artists chosen to bring *Mad*'s vision to life.

Severin, Wood, Davis and Elder, all employed as artists in the much-vaunted EC bullpen, were the natural choices to do the drawing. They had all worked on Harvey's war books. Of the four, John Severin was the weakest with the type of humor Harvey wanted to portray with *Mad*, although he was probably the best in the serious genre, with his natural gifts for representing uniforms, faces, and a sense of time and place.

Wallace Wood had the flash and glitter from his time in Harvey's books, but also from being the star of Bill Gaines' and Al Feldstein's science-fiction line. He had the ability to draw such pretty people: Flesh Garden and Dale, Superduperman and Lois, Batboy and Rubin. Well, maybe not *all* of them were so pretty.

Jack Davis had the hairy, scary style. His forte was the horror story that, along with those of Graham Ingels, were what kept kids awake at night, sweating into their pillows. As a gifted cartoonist, though, Davis had few peers, and *Mad* certainly brought that out, as well as assure him a place among the legends of 20th century funnymen.

It is Will Elder (who signed his name Bill Elder in those days) who was a greater part of the soul of *Mad*. Of all of the artists who worked with Kurtzman, none was as plugged into his vision as Elder. As comix historian and long-time fan Clay Geerdes put it: "Bill Elder was the master of associative ideas and Kurtzman's landscapes would have been barren without Elder's *tzatzkelach* (Yiddish for 'a lot of little things.')"

It was those little things that kept the readers of *Mad* peeking into the corners of every panel Elder drew, looking for the evidence of that mania that infused his artwork.

Elder wasn't naturally the odds-on favorite of some fans right from the beginning. In my own case, I liked Wood and Davis better at first, growing to appreciate Elder later. Forty-year *Mad* fan Eddie Hunter had this to say about his own growth as a fan: "I think to start out Wood was my favorite artist. Next was Davis, and after that Elder. But, as I began to study each issue, studying the details more, going back to earlier issues and studying them again Bill Elder developed into my favorite. it seemed to me that Bill Elder, with his many little side jokes and oddities could complement a Kurtzman story the best . . . to a novice *Mad* comic book reader Wood . . . would be more impressive. And, as one became seasoned, Elder seemed to fit *Mad*'s bill more."

Elder, born in 1922, and Kurtzman, born in 1924, had gone to school together at the High School of Music and Art in New York City. John Severin, later a partner to both Harvey and Will, was a classmate.

Kurtzman described Elder as a practical joker, a class clown, goofing it up in the lunchroom for the amusement of his fellow students. Years later in almost every caricature drawn for *Mad* Elder is shown to be a face-pulling, eyes-crossed, lampshade on the head type of guy. It comes out in his artwork. Elder even commented that *Mad* gave him the opportunity to put his kind of manic energy on paper, reaching a mass audience instead of a few dozen people in a school cafeteria.

Elder and Kurtzman, as well as Severin, were veterans of World War II who went into comic book work as part of a studio after the war. In those early days Elder and Severin worked together. In retrospect, an odd couple. Severin, the master of realism, and Elder, the heir-apparent to the screwball cartoonists of the Sunday funnies.

Why the pairing? Elder put it in practical terms: "He couldn't ink, and I couldn't draw."

That seems half right. In those days, Severin inked with a somewhat tentative pen line. Elder's inking with a brush was bold and perfectly suited to the imperfect medium of comic books, printed on cheap newsprint by high speed letterpresses. Elder had already done his own drawing for comics' first woman publisher, Rae Herman, on a strip called "Rufus Debris" shortly after the war.

Harvey had contacts at EC; he had gone to them after seeing their name in the phone book as Educational Comics. It wasn't long before the trio was working for Bill Gaines in various capacities.

In 1952, when the synchronistic events had coalesced into that event that popped onto the scene as *Mad* #1, comic books were probably the most despised medium of entertainment by the parents of America. Their kids loved comics, of course, but increasing hysteria certainly drew unwanted attention to them, from parents' groups, Senate committees, and a certain New York psychiatrist named Frederic Wertham, who lead the charge with his stridency of voice and hatred of the comics.

And yet, and this is the important thing: Here was EC, now known as Entertaining Comics, where the artists were proud of their work and signed all of their stories. Some even had their photos published as the "EC Artist of the Issue".

Severin and Elder were there as a team in *Frontline Combat* #5 smiling at the readers. Severin, big and handsome, hovering above Elder, who looks mischievous.

When *Mad* began it had a bit of a sputtering start storywise, as if Harvey hadn't decided exactly what type of humor or parodies he wanted to present. The art, however, came out fully professional, as the artists were near their peaks of artistic skill from all of the practice they had gotten the year before in the other EC books.

The timing...the personal levels of excellence...the being there at the right place in the right time, was the synchronicity that *Mad* was blessed with from the start.

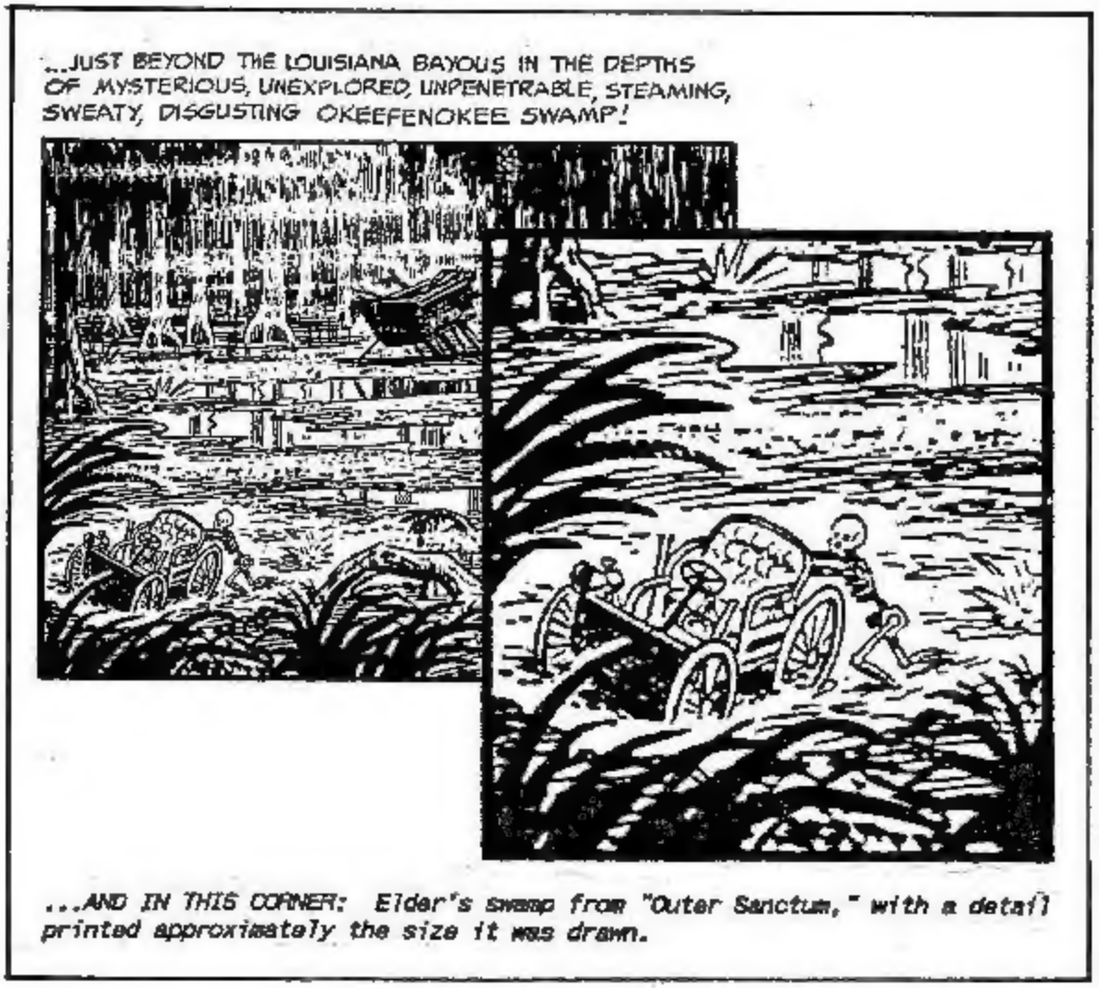
But it's also been said that *Mad* lost money for the first three issues, and that with "Superduperman" in issue #4 began to make money. While Wood would naturally be given credit for that, it seems odd to me that anyone would pick up *Mad* from the newsstand unless they looked at the cover and decided to look inside. They would see "Superduperman," and hustle to the newsdealer with their dime.

What a reader, scanning the comic book rack would have seen on the cover of *Mad* #4 is a Kurtzman rendering of what is inside an Elder story, "Shadow." The cover is brilliantly designed to catch the eye, with the *Mad* logo overlaid with a noose; there is a shapely girl, the Shadow character (a weird looking little man in a cloak and big hat), and enough phallic symbols: a cannon, snake, branch, spear, telephone pole, to keep Dr. Wertham busy for days. This is a foreshadowing (pun intended) of what one finds within. The screwball humor that characterized the Kurtzman/Elder team. In its own right, "Shadow" is a much zanier tale than "Superduperman," although certainly less eye-catching to a casual reader than the Wood masterpiece.

Kurtzman wrote for the strengths of his artists. It would be hard to imagine Elder doing "Superduperman," or Wood doing "Shadow."

*Mad* #5, the infamous issue that distributors kept off so many newsstands that it was rare right from its publication, begins with an Elder cover, and of the first 5 issues, easily the weakest. While at first glance it has all of the elements, for some reason they don't play together very well. Maybe Elder was better at the continuity panels in those days, but this cover, his sole *Mad* comics cover, is not a good example of his art. It was also something to cause more consternation among the distributors, who wouldn't need any more to make them angry after the phony biography of Bill Gaines on the inside cover which, among other things, proclaimed that Bill wanted "sadism, snakes, masochism, pyromania, snakes, fetishes, snakes, necrophilia, phallic symbols (remember *Mad* #4), snakes, and all the rest of that esoterica what I can't think of this minute."

Gaines should have left the writing to Kurtzman, because any ha ha's that this misguided piece garnered certainly rang hollow as they hit the floor.


...JUST BEYOND THE LOUISIANA BAYOUS IN THE DEPTHS OF MYSTERIOUS, UNEXPLORED, UNPENETRABLE, STEAMING, SWEATY, DISGUSTING OKEEFENOKEE SWAMP!

*...AND IN THIS CORNER: Elder's swamp from "Outer Sanctum," with a detail printed approximately the size it was drawn.*

All the distributors had to do was look at the Elder cover: A bosomy girl with a tattoo, a man getting bamboo slivers under his fingernails, a green man with knives sticking out of his chest, and a hatchet out of his head. In the upper right corner is a woman who has turned blue after being strangled by a noosed rope in the left hand of a sinister man who is holding a smoking automatic pistol in his right.

Kids would love this cover. Adults would cringe before starting to froth. It might be one of the reasons that this jinxed issue was Elder's one and only cover illustration.

But inside, Elder had the lead story. In my opinion, the start of what we later knew as the Elder genius. The side jokes, the brilliant comic illustrations, everything that we know and love about Elder today in one story, "Outer Sanctum."

Yes, the first four issues all had Elder, but the first two stories, "Ganefs" (Yiddish for thieves), and "Mole", Elder's story which Kurtzman had put into script form for him, were basically one-joke stories. Events transpired much like an old Mack Sennett comedy. The set-up of the situation, the chase, conclusion. Fine, but not genius-class stuff.

"Dragged Net" (*Mad* #3) despite not using caricatures of Jack Webb and Ben Alexander as he was to do in a later issue, was a good story with a multi-leveled joke structure to it, as was "Shadow" in #4, but it was "Outer Sanctum" that really set Elder apart. Not just as the adjunct to Kurtzman, but as a full-fledged partner.

Of course, "Outer Sanctum" is a satire on an old radio program. The creaking door and the intonations of "Raymond, your host," as narrator of spooky tales were well known to radio listeners of Kurtzman and Elder's generation, and were still familiar to readers of *Mad* in 1953. But that wasn't all that the story satirized. It also stuck a pin in the swollen balloon of the popularity and importance of Feldstein and Gaines' horror comics to the EC line, a genre that Kurtzman reportedly deplored.

"AN ODD CRY LIKE A STEPPED-ON CAT CAME FROM THE TIN CANNED DEPTHS OF "HEAP," AND IN A MAD LOVER'S FRENZY KICKED AWAY THE SINGLE BROOMSTICK...

*Heap goes on a rampage.*

*FEH! Elder and Feldstein draw shacks. From* Mad *#5 and* Haunt of Fear *#15 (#1).*

SUDDENLY THE SCENT OF MANY MASHED POLECATS DRIFTED FROM THE MIXTURE!... IN A FLASH, A LIFETIME OF RESEARCH WAS SPILLING OUT THE WINDOW!
FEH!

IN A FIT OF RAGE, PROFESSOR WARD HAD FLUNG THE BEAKER CONTAINING THEIR PRECIOUS COMBINATIONS OF CHEMICALS THROUGH THE WINDOW INTO THE STAGNANT, MURKY WATERS OF THE SWAMP...

The story, told by "Ramon, your ghost, er, host" drawn in a style reminiscent of Feldstein's Crypt-Keeper, concerns a swamp-dwelling mad scientist who lives in a leaning shack propped up by a broomstick. When we see the scientist there is something awfully peculiar about him: He has a big crack running through his egg-shaped dome and a baby bird is poking its tiny head out. The scientist mixes up a foul concoction, then throws it into the swamp. Comparing Elder's panel to a similar panel done by Feldstein in the first issue of *Haunt of Fear* shows obvious similarities.

But Elder's shack, while derived from Feldstein's drawing, has life. Artistically, Feldstein's is flat. Simple boards, a simple line drawing with a couple of speed lines to indicate that something has been thrown out of the window. Elder's shack has texture, and twice the visual interest of Feldstein's indifferent drawing.

The story continues. Rising out of the swamp as the result of the scientist's concoction mixing with swampwater is a vegetable swamp creature called Heap! This gives us a bit of pause. There was a character called The Heap in *Airboy Comics* at the time. Did Kurtzman and Elder know this? Apparently not. Their Heap is another in a line of swamp monsters that has their beginning with the story, "It!" by Theodore Sturgeon from a 1940 issue of *Unknown*, a fantasy magazine of that era.[1]

It's also the beginning of the textile-like weaving of jokes, and the multi-leveling of humor in the story.

In the story Heap, who has been stealing and robbing for the scientist, decides that he needs a mate. He dresses in a zoot suit, combs his "hair" in the shiny seat of a pair of pants hung on nails in the bathroom, and goes off to meet with his female garbage heap. The scientist, threatened, burns up the female garbage heap, and our Heap goes on a rampage. He runs off, dressed in a blue sport coat, still carrying flowers, followed by a fleet of street sweepers.

"Outer Sanctum" is rich in detail and humor. Every line drawn in that story gives impetus either to the story or the atmosphere. We are told that the swamp is "mysterious, unexplored, unpenetrable, steaming, sweaty and disgusting" as we see the scientist's shack for the first time in the background of the steaming swamp. In the foreground a skeleton is mired in place pushing a turn of the century automobile which has been stuck in the muck. The second panel of page 3 has a close-up of the shack, while toward the background a skeleton rows a kayak, and in the foreground a skeleton plays golf.

In those days comic book pages were drawn very large. 13" by 18" was common, but even so the work that Elder has put into those panels could in no way have ever been faithfully reproduced enough in the early 1950s to do that detail justice. These are things that the careful reader will spot, the careless reader pass right over, but that must have been very satisfying for the artist.

The last page of the story, which is part of the framing device, shows Ramon slowly closing the creaking door, while on the door panels themselves a series of small hieroglyphics play themselves out panel by panel. A sword swallower swallows his sword, only to pull it out with his stomach impaled on it.[2]

It's followed in *Mad* #6 by "Ping Pong", as sharp a satire of the Willis O'Brien stop-motion classic of 20 years prior as has ever been pub-

lished. In those days before television saturation popular movies like *King Kong* were periodically dusted off and re-released to theaters. Readers of *Mad* were probably familiar enough with the story, although the artwork doesn't try to caricature any of the actors. The gags are rich and visual. During the dinosaur chase of the crew through the jungle one of the pursuing saurians is actually a giant pair of pliers, a very clever anthropomorphizing of an everyday object. The further surprising take on the original story comes when Pong fully submits to the beauty, Lana Lynn, who bites, kicks and hits him into submission. Kurtzman's snap ending is a classic. Pong and the humans are much smaller than the people on the dock where they have landed in their return to civilization.

*Mad* #7 has the first of the two Shernlock Shomes stories. Shernlock deduces that a beautiful girl is coming to the door, and when a female arm comes through the doorway Shernlock kisses it, only to find that it belongs to the landlady, Mrs. Gowanus, who had "just been cleaning h'out the cesspool." In the next panel as Mrs. Gowanus waxes ecstatic about what she perceives as Shomes' love for her Shomes is shown using a blowtorch on his tongue.

Elder also takes the lead position with #8 and "Frank N. Stein." The story contains a masterpiece of a splash panel. As lightning flashes, a 3-tined fork is delineated as the lightning strike. The fork is stabbing into a giant turkey, which is camouflaged as a hill in the background. Making a cliche literal, carefully drawn dogs and cats fall out of the sky. Even some buckets! In the foreground a man is taking a shower in an open-curtained booth sitting on top of a telephone pole. It's only one of several bare-butt gags that Elder got away with in *Mad*. In fact, it's one of two that Elder drew in the same story.

As part of Kurtzman's apparent use of rotation for giving his artists the lead position, by issue #11 Elder was back in the back of the book with "Woman Wonder", a satire made striking in the 1990s by its political incorrectness. Well, you can't judge a story by what folks think now, but I think its message is strong even for the 1950s. Dr. Wertham said in *Seduction of the Innocent* that Wonder Woman was a frightening figure for boys because she was so powerful. Whether boys are now or ever were scared by strong women, in "Woman Wonder" she's put in her place—the kitchen, with a baby on her hip—while her husband, Steve, sits in his chair smoking and reading a newspaper. This is after he has beat her to a bloody pulp with his hobnailed boots while masquerading as the villain, Nivlek.

This story is a slight disappointment for Elder fans, not just because I think beating women, Wonder Women or not, is outside the realm of what I consider funny, but that the side gags are kept to a minimum. The art is otherwise typically fine as Elder more and more shows his solid drawing ability.

I mentioned the brush inking before. Elder used this technique almost exclusively during his *Mad* comics days, because it was standard for the comic books of the period. As he went on with his career he was also very successful with wash drawings, pen and ink with fineline shading and also watercolor, which he used to such an advantage in *Playboy's* "Little Annie Fanny."

Elder's ink line is splendid, but splendid also because he knew how to draw figures with weight and mass who could also look funny. It takes a rare talent. All of Kurtzman's Big Three had it, to take familiarity and with a little juxtaposition of the realistic with the surreal, the normal with the abnormal, turn it into something which looks familiar, but on examination is anything but.

It also takes the ability to draw, and it is obvious that Elder knew how to do that from his ability to render even common objects in his panels so that by their presence the madness becomes even more apparent by comparison.

Elder is so good, and makes it look so easy. With a few lines he has captured completely the deadpan look of Jack Webb. Even Ben Alexander as Ed Saturday, although drawn much smaller than Joe Friday to give the pairing that slightly out-of-sync look of a Mutt and Jeff team, is fairly exact in his representation.

Kurtzman and Elder capture most of the quirkiness of this early television hit. In those days companies were sole sponsors of programs, a holdover from radio days. Chesterfield cigarettes sponsored *Dragnet*, so Kurtzman and Elder show the characters not only chain-smoking cigarettes but smoking mouthsful of cigarettes at once. The intrusiveness of the dramatic theme music is also shown, as every other page ends with an Elder-styled orchestra bursting into the room playing "DOM DA DOMM DOMM!" The background running gag throughout "Dragged Net," the large immigrant woman hollering for "Villie!" is artist as character, as "Villie" becomes "Villie Elder!" represented as a grubby urchin playing the "Dragged Net" theme through a kazoo.

This ability to capture the likeness and look of someone, not only television personalities, but especially a comic book or comic strip character started taking over as the hallmark of Elder's work. In *Mad* #12 Kurtzman and Elder pulled out the stops on the eye-popping, near-

*DRAGGED NET: Friday, Saturday, these music and a pretty girl.* (Mad #11).

DOM BADOMM
DOM BADOMM BADOMM
DOM BADOM
DOM BADOM
BADOM
STORK CLUB
'SCUSE US, MAM! POLICE OFFICERS! WE'VE JUST FOLLOWED YOU 'CROSS THE TOWN, THROUGH THE SUBWAY, UP THE ELEVATOR INTO YOUR APARTMENT, OUT TO YOUR KITCHEN IN ORDER TO ASK YOU ROUTINE QUESTIONS! YOU SHOULDN'T MIND ANSWERING THEM IF YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO HIDE!
I'LL BE GLAD TO COOPERATE, OFFICERS!
...OH! WOULD YOU PLEASE HOLD THIS FOR ME A MINUTE, OFFICERS?

I don't intend to go through every Elder story for *Mad*, but "Dragged Net" in *Mad* #11 another of Elder's major talents surfaces, that of caricature. In the first "Dragged Net" (*Mad* #3), *Dragnet* stars Jack Webb and Ben Alexander weren't caricatured, but by the time of #11 were recognizable enough by a readership (and Kurtzman) more familiar with television and so the stars of the program were drawn into the story.

exact rendition of Archie, incarnated to *Mad* readers as "Starchie." It was apparently distressing to the folks at Archie Comics, who were said to have howled at this delinquent desecration of their perennial teenager and his friends, Reggie and Jughead, girlfriends Betty and Veronica, and Mr. Weatherbee, the principal. They are renamed Wedgie, Bottleneck, Biddy, Salonica and Mr. Weathernot in the *Mad* version.

...WELL... HERE I AM... TYPICAL TEEN-AGE ME IN MY TYPICAL TEEN-AGE HOME!... WHERE IS MY TYPICAL TEEN-AGE MOTHER?
MOTHER
I'M HO-OME!
SHODDUP YOU NO GOOD BUM... YELLING IN YOUR CRACKED VOICE WHENEVER YOU COME HOME FROM THE POOL-HALL!.. AND YOU STEPPED ON MY FRESH-WAXED FLOOR!
LIKE A RUSTY PUSH-CART YOU COME IN YELLING, WAKING UP YOUR POOR FODDER! WATTAYA GOTTA YELL FOR...
SHODDOP!... I'M A POOR TYPICAL TEEN-AGE FATHER JUST BACK FROM SLAVING IN THE BOILER FACTORY! WHO WAKES ME UP FROM MY NAP? WHO MAKES NOISE IN MY TEEN-AGE HOUSE?
SMEK SMEK
WHO MAKES NOISE?
YOU TELL ME TO SHODDOP YOU BUM!
SHODDOP YOU-BIG LOUD MOUTHS!
SHODDOP EVERYONE WHO YELLS SHODDOP!
NOW PLAYING AT BIJOU "THE QUIET MAN"
SMEK
4

*NO WONDER HE'S A BUM! Imaginable. Shoddop!* *The most awful home life "Starchie", Mad #12.*

In the opening sequence Mr. Weathernot is shown shamelessly chasing the girls around his office because as he tells Starchie and Bottleneck, "they're drawn so gosh darned cute!" while simultaneously pouring himself a drink.

"Starchie" is a nightmare world of teenage life. Starchie and Bottleneck are teenage criminals, running a racket through their high school. They are about to be sent back to grade school by the principal, so by inference Starchie beats him up. It isn't shown in graphic detail but by the bottom of page 2 we know that Starchie is a very cold-blooded and murderous character, as he leaves the principal's office and tosses his bloodied blackjack and brass knuckles to Bottleneck.

Starchie's home life isn't any better. He enters his home through a freight lift to an underground "teen-age house" shared with a shrieking mother and a shouting father. Today we'd call this family "dysfunctional," if you could characterize it as that healthy from the startling drawings of screaming people. By the end of the story Starchie is sitting in a prison cell, and in a take on the crime comics of the day, regrets his life, and especially that he didn't take advantage of Biddy, who threw herself at him sexually.

To be fair to *Mad*, Archie Comics were sexy in a pin-up sort of a way, even after the Comics Code came in, and *Mad*'s version alluded to it, but didn't flaunt it. Their parody is what Archie's life would have been like if he'd gone wrong, and was also a satire on the newsworthy image of the social phenomenon, the juvenile delinquent.

When *Panic* was added to the EC roster Elder's gift for exacting parodies of comic strips was used to great advantage. "Li'l Melvin," "Mel Padooka," "Captain Izzy," and "Tick Dracy" are examples of the head-turning ability to reproduce the original. In Maria Reidelbach's *Completely Mad*, Kurtzman explains, "Will understood parody. . .what it is, is mimicry. Willy (*sic*) was just so good at it. He understood that you had to have an exact duplicate of what you're parodying."

There were subtle differences in Kurtzman's parodies and those provided to Elder in other magazines. Because of Kurtzman's layouts Elder was able to program those differences into his own artwork. Archie and Jughead, as they become Starchie and Bottleneck in Kurtzman's warped world, affect slouches, smoke cigarettes and spit. Another editor would have probably been satisfied to keep the look of the original, posture and all, since Elder was certainly capable of delivering that.

Kurtzman's layouts are so important to Elder's work in those early days that if we look at work that Will did simultaneous to his *Mad* work it becomes apparent that he was leaning heavily on Kurtzman's ability to portray the figure in motion. Elder did do some strips for Feldstein during this period, a handful of horror and science-fiction strips. What we see when we look at these strips is Elder's attempt to draw "serious," and to him serious must have meant making his figures as stiff as Feldstein, because he doesn't have the movement and fluidity in the figure drawing that Kurtzman helped provide.

Feldstein's method of scripting was so different than Harvey's with his careful layouts on tissue overlays. Feldstein would write the strip directly onto the artboard that the artist used. The stiffness could be how Elder perceived the artwork would work the best on these strips. Perhaps he was using Feldstein's early works in his own edited books as a guide.

Earlier on I mentioned Elder's career as a practical joker. Kurtzman told a story on him. When Willie was a boy he dressed some meat up in children's clothes and put it near the railroad tracks, so that it would look as if a child had been hit and mutilated by a train.

Years later this incident from Elder's childhood showed up in the story "Last Laugh" in *Tales From the Crypt* #38. Elder once said that Feldstein had asked him to do some scripting because he was too busy. Perhaps this is one of those stories, or perhaps it's an example of Elder telling his own story to a writer and having it used as a springboard for a typical EC horror story.

In any case, in "Last Laugh" the boy-Elder has become an adult, the obnoxious, obese, buck-toothed Ernie Ceely, who visits a doctor complaining of stomach pains. During the course of the visit Ernie confesses his love of practical jokes, and describes the aforementioned railroad-track stunt to the doctor.

It turns out that the practical joke had had some very dire consequences that Ernie hadn't realized. Because of his thoughtlessness the doctor's wife and son had been killed, and so the doctor takes his revenge, EC-style.

It's as if after all of those years Elder was purging himself of the memory, and in his adult form could see that his "harmless prank" could very well have had serious repercussions. So, to EC's younger readers it becomes not only a story of revenge but a cautionary tale.

The cover date of this issue of *Crypt* matches that of *Mad* #7, with

its "Shermlock Shomes" story. We can surmise that the stories were drawn in roughly the same period, but while the *Mad* story is notable for its genius, the *Crypt* story is notable for its routine treatment of its subject matter. It's relegated to 6 pages, the standard EC third story, usually the shortest and weakest in all of Feldstein's titles.

Elder's artwork in science-fiction and horror isn't bad, but is an uncomfortable mix of styles familiar to readers of those genres. Several places throughout the story Elder uses Woody's "flashlight-on-the-face" technique. This is a Wood originated trick of having a shadow fall onto one side of the face, captured just under the curve of one cheekbone, and just to the side of center on the forehead and chin. While it is used to heighten drama, it doesn't make much sense artistically, especially in Elder's hands.

Of course, as with most of the wordy dialogue-driven stories in Feldstein's books the main challenge for the artist is to draw panels from interesting angles and to give visuals to what boils down to people talking.

Compared to "Strop! You're Killing Me!" in *Crypt* #37, Elder's final panel in "Last Laugh" is tame, despite its insinuated horror. "Strop!" was reprinted in the Nostalgia Press book, *Horror Comics of the 1950s*, in the early 1970s, presumably because of its gory last panel, rather than because of any kind of inspiration in Elder's workmanlike, but uninspired artwork. Again, the Feldstein stiffness, but only one Wood-like effect panel. The introduction to the story by Douglas Menville in *Horror Comics* is even more blunt: "Elder . . . could not create the visual atmosphere so necessary to a successful horror tale. Although the antagonist (in true EC fashion) suffers as horrible a fate as any EC villain, somehow there is no visual punch."

At the time Elder did these stories his solo career at EC was approximately a year old, and his experience, despite the flaws in his "serious" style, shows. What is presumably his first EC solo job, "Inside Story," in *Weird Science* #14, is also stiff and weak, although in its own way the story is charming (as if an EC story could ever be said to be "charming") by the use of a small character in the last couple of pages to give the story an interesting twist. I assume this is a Feldstein story, and it appears that he was using Elder's comedy in a subtle way. It's apparent right from the start that Elder's forte was not as a solo artist in either the horror or science fiction genre.

Elder attained the ranks of the notorious by inclusion of panels from his *Weird Science* #19 story, "Right on the Button" in *Seduction of the Innocent*. It's curious that this would be included in Wertham's book, and might say more about Wertham and what he found appalling, because there were certainly a lot more horrible examples in any routine issues of Feldstein/Gaines' horror and s-f than this story. As a matter of fact, this story might sink into obscurity without that notoriety.

What Feldstein did do right with Elder's genius was to channel it into *Panic*, where Elder quickly became the star. Unlike *Mad*, where Elder had less than 50% of the lead stories in 22 issues (and none at all in the last comic book issue, #23) in *Panic* Elder was given the lead spot in a whopping 10 of 12 issues, and had 2 stories apiece in the last 3 issues.

*Panic* wasn't *Mad*, and Kurtzman is missed, but at this stage in his artistic career Elder was self-reliant enough that he was able to break free of Kurtzman and go solo with all of the *Mad* lessons learned.

*Panic* #1 is dated March, 1954, the same as *Mad* #9, so we can assume that the stories done for both issues were drawn at roughly the same time. Both stories are send-ups of famous poems. "The Raven" in *Mad*, and "The Night Before Christmas" in *Panic*. They both have something of the same kind of manic energy, which takes the imagery of both poems and rips it to shreds, but whereas Kurtzman's layouts place "The Raven" in a milieu reminiscent of Poe—a dark study, where a man is being introspective about a lost love—the *Panic* poem is as full of bizarre and crazy contemporary images as any Elder story ever drawn.

The splash page of "Night" is grotesque. A large drawing of disturbing images of slaughtered animals, their carcasses dangling from meat hooks. A drunken sheep is labeled "a stewed lamb," a lion has a sign for "tender-lion steak!" As the

*Ernie Ceely's practical jokes get him hooked.* ("Last Laugh," Tales From the Crypt #38).

*Cutting up at the old fire house.* ("Strop! You're Killing Me!" Tales From the Crypt #37).

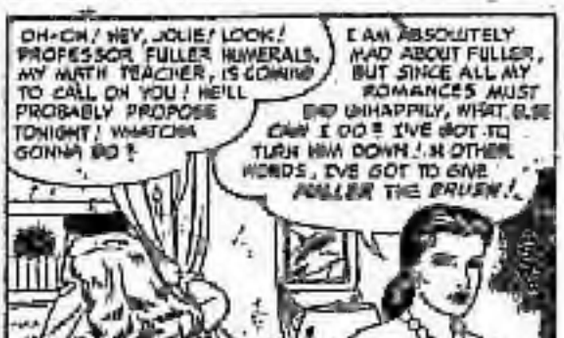
SO LAST WEEK, I BUY ME SOME HUNKS OF HORSE-MEAT. REAL CHEAP STUFF. BIG AN' RAW AN' BLOODY. AN' I BUY ME SOME KID'S CLOTHES. AN' I STUFF THE MEAT IN THE KID'S CLOTHES AND I GO DOWN TO THE TRACKS ABOUT NOON AND I LAY THE MESS ON THE TRACKS NEAR WHERE SOME KIDS IS PLAYIN'...
ERNIE STOOD, DISROBED, BEFORE THE DOCTOR, STARING AT HIS WIDE FLAMING EYES...
YOU!
YES, MR. CEELY, THAT WAS MY FAMILY'S STORY. THE EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DIED FROM BEING STRUCK BY THE TRUCK. THE BABY DROWNED. MY WIFE DROPPED DEAD OF A HEART ATTACK...
DOCTOR FALDER'S GRIP WAS LIKE A VISE OF STEEL AS HE TIED ERNIE CEELY TO THE EXAMINATION TABLE...
YOU SAY YOU ALMOST DIED LAUGHING OVER YOUR PRACTICAL JOKE, MR. CEELY? WELL, NOW YOU WILL DIE LAUGHING! THOSE CAPSULES I GAVE YOU CONTAINED FISH HOOKS... BARBED LITTLE FISH HOOKS...
NO! NO!
HE RUSHED TO THE DESCENT-POLE, WRAPPED HIS ARMS AND LEGS AROUND IT, AND PLUMMETED DOWN-WARD...
OH, LORD... I KNOW! I KNOW WHOSE VOICE THAT WAS! IT WAS HIS! OLD DAN HARPER'S! NO! NO, IT COULDN'T...
E-E-E-E
THE NEXT MORNING, THEY FOUND WHAT WAS LEFT OF CHIEF MILLER LYING BESIDE THE NEW FIRE-ENGINE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE DESCENT-POLE IN A POOL OF DRYING BLOOD. HIS ARMS AND LEGS HAD BEEN SEVERED FROM HIS BODY AND HIS TORSO NEARLY SPLIT IN TWO. SOMEONE... OR SOMETHING... HAD REPLACED THE DESCENT-POLE WITH A STEEL STRIP, SHARPENED TO A KEEN RAZOR-EDGE...

LATER) AT P.U. POTRZEBIE'S COTTAGE...
SO YOU'RE BACK, P.U. POTRZEBIE AND FERN-LUGGINER FANNY... ALIAS SANDY SELMA!
WE NEVER WENT NOWHERE!
AH! AND YOU'RE HERE, TOO, TONIC SPARKHEART...
JUST DROPPED IN FOR A SNIFF, BRACY...
WELL, ONE OF YOU HAS BEEN SLASHING MY WIFE'S FACE THESE LAST FOUR NIGHTS! WHICH ONE OF YOU IS IT?
SEARCH ME!
WHAT A DISGUSTING THOUGHT!

Hello, Wilt! Anything new happen today, dear?
...I'll say something new happened, Phyllus! I found a new way to keep my cow-lick down!
...Also I found a baby on the stoop! I think I'll call him Skizziks Wilt!
BAND-AID PLASTIC STRIPS

...Skizziks... spelled backwards is Skizziks!
...Look, Phyllus!... He's walking!... The kid really grows on you!
...There's some money for jelly-beans, Skizziks! Go out and play now!
Oke!

THAT'S THE TROUBLE! YOU GIRLS ARE ALWAYS FUMBLING! WON'T YOU EVER HAVE A SUCCESSFUL ROMANCE? WON'T YOU EVER GET MARRIED AND...
LISTEN, POP! JUST BECAUSE WE'RE DRAWN REALISTICALLY, WITH REALISTIC BACKGROUNDS AND REALISTIC LIGHTING EFFECTS, DOESN'T MEAN WE'RE REALISTIC PEOPLE. WE JUST DON'T HAVE SUCCESSFUL ROMANCES! HEY, IF ONE OF US GETS MARRIED, THIS STRIP DIES! SO FORGET IT.


OH-OH! HEY, JOLIE! LOOK! PROFESSOR FULLER NUMERALS, MY MATH TEACHER, IS GONNA TO CALL ON YOU! HE'LL PROBABLY PROPOSE TONIGHT! WHATCHA GONNA DO?
I AM ABSOLUTELY MAD ABOUT FULLER, BUT SINCE ALL MY ROMANCES MUST END UNHAPPILY, WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? I'VE GOT TO TURN HIM DOWN! IN OTHER WORDS, I'VE GOT TO GIVE FULLER THE BRUSH!

OH, HOW SWEET! A FEW MOMENTS AGO THEY WERE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS! AND NOW, AFTER JUST A FEW WORDS OF ADVICE FROM YOU, THEY'RE PRACTICALLY SMOOCHERING ONE ANOTHER...
WITH KISSES?
NO! WITH KISSES!

*FECT MIMIC. Examples of Elder's ability to ape other artists' styles fection. "Tick Dracy" from Panic #5, "Gasoline Valley" from Mad #15, aches of Joliet's Groans" from Panic #12, and "Mary Worthless" from #11.*

*LITTLE MAN SYNDROME. Elder's first solo jobs for EC. "Inside Story" from WS #14 is talky and stiff. "Genefs" from Mad #1 shows the benefit of Kurtzman.*

I KNOW! YOU'RE NOT AFRAID OF WHAT WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO DO TO YOU!
NOT AT ALL! IN A TWO-DIMENSIONAL WORLD, A JAIL IS MERELY A CIRCULAR LINE! SO THE CREATURE WHO DISCOVERED HOW TO RISE UP WERE LOCKED IN IT...
YOU MEAN...
MR. THROBBINS JUST SEEMED TO DISAPPEAR! HIS VOICE CAME FROM EVERYWHERE AT ONCE! THE LIEUTENANT AND THE CORONER STARED AT THE SPOT WHERE HE'D BEEN...
...IT COULDN'T HOLD HIM VERY WELL...NOW IT COULD!!
H-H-NOT VERY WELL, THROBBINS!
THE END
7

...DEY WATCH AN' DEY WATCH... ...EN DEY GET TIRED AN' TAKE ...E DE FAKE PACKAGE... WHICH ...TINK IS DE REAL PACKAGE! WHEN DEY OPEN IT, ...EAD OF DEIR MONEY, DEY ...ND A STINK BOMB!
A STINK BOMB!
WHAT A GAG!
HEEE!
YA-HA-HA-HA-HO-HO
SHADDAP!
THE TIME HAS COME! SYNCHRONISE YOUR WATCHES! 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... HACK! LET'S GO!
Z

*double take in panel #5.*

poem proclaims that "not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse," a mouse is shown hanging by its tail with a tag dangling from its paw that says "portermouse steak." The shocking images of the animals gives new meaning to "horrible puns."

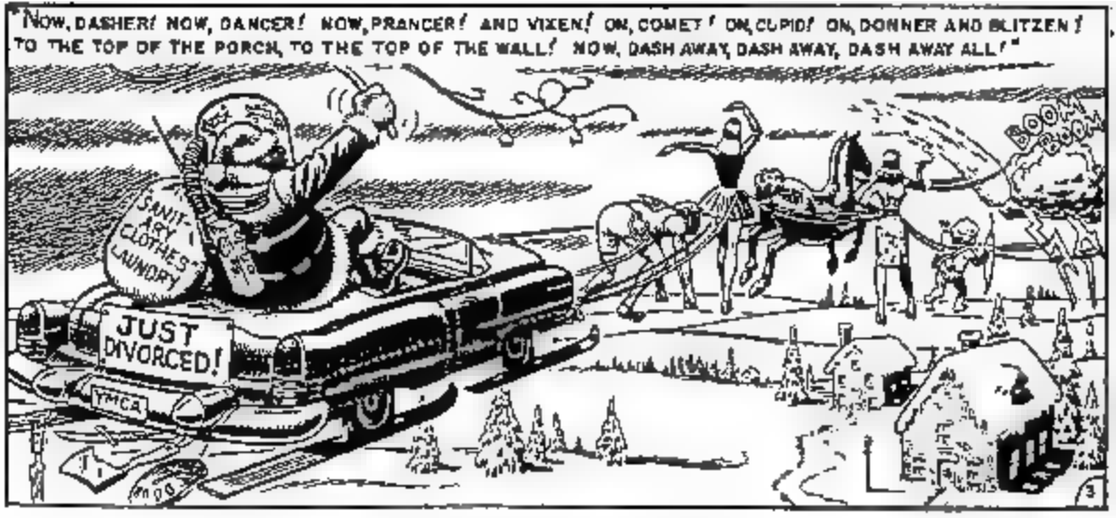
"The Night Before Christmas" attained national press because the very staid Boston community banned it, which got Gaines yet another 15 minutes of fame by counterattacking with his promise not to sell any more of his *Picture Stories From the Bible* comics in Boston. Of course, any publicity is good publicity, and it was right for Gaines to jump on the silly reasons for banning the comic, which he claimed came from the sign on Santa Claus' sleigh which pronounces "Just Divorced." Since at the time St. Nicholas was a saint of the Catholic Church the Catholic Boston could not accept a divorced Santa Claus.

I have a hunch that this strip was solely the work of Elder, without a scripter in the sense of Feldstein or Kurtzman. It may be one of those jobs that Elder claimed Feldstein had him write. it is also one of Elder's richest strips for word play, as each panel is shown with a literal interpretation of Clement Moore's famous poem, as far as propriety would take it. "The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow" has Earth's moon sitting on the lawn with golf flags sticking out of the craters. We can only imagine what Elder had to mentally eliminate there.

In the famous "just divorced" panel, Santa is whipping his "reindeer" with the words from the poem, "Now Dasher, now Dancer..." while what is shown leading his sleigh are the literal embodiments of those familiar reindeer names: A runner, a ballet dancer, a prancing horse, a "vixen" (a prostitute—or as close as he could come to indicating one. The Boston folks might have been too busy looking at the "just divorced" sign to notice this.)

The last page of the strip is a full-page montage of caricatures of the EC staff coming out of Santa's sack, beautifully realized in Elder's style, led by a giant-sized Santa Claus/Gaines in a wheelchair. On the arm of the chair are bottles of pills labeled "reducing pills," "sleeping pills," and "when business gets bad pills." It tells us what Gaines' life was like in those stressful days. He admitted that the diet pills kept him awake at night, so he read stories that he used to pitch to Feldstein as springboards for EC stories. His well-known obsession with food and wine certainly gave him his girth.

Gaines was also very generous to his employees at Christmas when business was good, and this would certainly make him "Santa" to them.


"NOW, DASHER! NOW, DANCER! NOW, PRANCER! AND VIXEN! ON, COMET! ON, CUPID! ON, DONNER AND BLITZEN! TO THE TOP OF THE PORCH, TO THE TOP OF THE WALL! NOW, DASH AWAY, DASH AWAY, DASH AWAY ALL!"
SANIT-ARY CLOTHES LAUNDRY
JUST DIVORCED!
YMCA

*BANNED IN BOSTON:* Panic #1.

"The Lady or the Tiger" is a famous fable which presents a literary question whose solution is left up to the reader. Elder takes this fable and turns it upside down in *Panic* #2, while over at *Mad* he and Kurtzman were doing in "Dragged Net."

At approximately the same time as his "Starchie" story in *Mad*, Elder did the first of his comic strip parodies for *Panic* with "Li'l Melvin," as direct a knockoff of the famous Al Capp Li'l Abner strip as has ever been done. Elder, whose inking style was already somewhat similar to Capp's, did the broken-line inking that Capp was noted for without a hitch. Because the styles are so close, one can imagine Elder fitting right into Capp's staff, giving Al more time to chase young women. Of course, no Elder story is complete without throwing in a couple more parodies to add to the general daffiness, so Elder tossed in Popeye and Albert the Alligator for good measure.

I believe this story and "The Lady or the Tiger" were scripted by Feldstein, if only because of the running gags that Feldstein used to close the stories. Read out of context the running jokes seem jarring, so each of these issues of *Panic* has to be read as an individual unit. As Kurtzman did before him, with "The Face on the Floor" in *Mad*, Feldstein inserts the hideous "Lena the Hyena" by Basil Wolverton into the last panel.

The August, 1954 issues of both *Mad* and *Panic* give Elder the lead story. *Mad* has "Manduck the Magician," a strip which points out the absurdities of the Lee Falk/Phil Davis magician strip and also is another example of how Elder could draw pretty girls in the Bettie Page image, and *Panic* gives us "Smiddy," a parody of a once-popular strip about an office boy.

In "Manduck" Elder (and presumably Kurtzman) paste in the familiar photos of Charles Atlas. Atlas was a near icon, appearing in most of the comic books of the era. He may have been comics' biggest advertiser at the time, selling his brand of isometric exercises successfully to skinny kids who got sand kicked in their faces. If they'd been out exercising instead of reading comic books they might have had some muscles. I can imagine the feelings around the EC offices at the time. Gaines was an iconoclast who didn't mind a little trouble, but he probably had to give the go-ahead to use the Atlas image, as it was tweaking the nose of a very big advertiser. Elder made the most of the situation, drawing small curling hairs on Atlas' shaven chest in one panel with the words, "I was raised on chicken fat" on Atlas' swim trunks, and in the next panel has Atlas holding a sign with a phrase familiar to readers of pulp magazines, "Why stay ruptured?"

With "Gasoline Valley" in *Mad* #15 Elder abandoned his brush for the pen-stylings of Frank King, and his usual perfection at appropriating someone else's style. Kurtzman pulled out the stops on this strip, also, satirizing one of the most famous elements of the strip, that of characters who age naturally.

Not so lucky is "Tick Dracy" in *Panic* #5. Chester Gould's "Dick Tracy" has been a parodist's delight because of the eccentricities and unique qualities of Gould's drawing and inking. With his feet in the early 1930s Gould's artwork was a very unusual blend of realism and cartooning, and that part Elder captured with his usual brilliance. Unfortunately, this story is saddled with poor writing (presumably not Feldstein, and I believe it may be an early attempt by writer/cartoonist Jack Mendelsohn) and one of the lamest jokes on Tracy's sharply-drawn facial features ever.

A similar problem plagues Elder's lead story in *Panic* #6, "The

*THE AMAZING RESTAURANT. How many people can you count in this splash panel? (From Mad #16.)*

Phanson," also what may be a Mendelsohn job, and even though it's a parody on another Lee Falk strip, it doesn't have Kurtzman to make any sense of the satire. Since the source material, "The Phantom," is about a man deep in the African jungle who wears a purple costume and domino mask in tropical heat, and is one of a line of Phantoms going back 400 years it seems a parody of itself, and that might be the failure of the writing here.

The next two issues of *Panic* give Joe Palooka and Alley Oop the Elder treatment, although both appear to be less than inspired jobs, both in art and writing. Meanwhile, at *Mad* Elder and Kurtzman were entertaining us with "Shermlock Shomes and the Hound of the Basketballs," and the lavishly produced strip, "Restaurant."

"Restaurant" is published as the third strip in *Mad* #16, which gives Elder two slots in that month's issue, and may explain some of the rushed looking elements of both "Mel Padooka" and "Irving Oops" in *Panic*. From its splash panel on it is obvious that Elder poured a tremendous amount of time and effort into "Restaurant." The splash is a mind-boggling cartoon of a crowded restaurant, presaging the work he later did for Kurtzman in the few issues of *Mad* magazine that Kurtzman edited. I counted 50 people in the panel before I quit, and every person is a fully realized individual. Gaines would have gone over budget if he had paid Elder by the character rather than by the page in this strip.

Elder's contribution to *Mad* #17 is part of a much-criticized effort by Kurtzman to show the realistic side of an old time slapstick comic strip, "Bringing Up Father." Even by 1954 this strip's gags had gotten stale, so Kurtzman parodied it by alternating pages done by Elder in the familiar George McManus-style with the realistic renderings of Bernie Krigstein. The problem is not that the idea doesn't have merit, it's just that Krigstein might have been a poor choice because of his style. It fit well into the horror and crime comics, but like the failed attempts to be funny by John Severin, Krigstein had failed with his first *Mad* attempt, "From Eternity Back to Here," and now with "Bringing Back Father."

Of course, "realism" is a subjective term when applied to comic art. By its nature, comic art is only a crude representation of the human figure. We recognize it as such because in real life no one has black ink lines running around themselves. Perhaps the idea for "Bringing Back Father" might have been more successful had Kurtzman used photographs of posed actors as he did so well with his fumettis a decade later in *Help!*

It's useless to second guess the past, but as a creator Kurtzman would never stand still. He could have kept *Mad* at a successful status quo—Feldstein and Gaines did it for nearly 30 years—but he was always looking for new ways to do things.

Some things he struck out on. I think that there is some general decline in *Mad* from this issue on, although you wouldn't really detect it from Elder's contributions, especially when *Mad* provided us with "Howdy Dooit," a satire of early television so powerful in its execution that it still has the power to make us marvel at Elder's technical ability. Not only in his style (the use of Craftint to give the drawings their toned texture), but also to capture the look and feel of the actors and the puppet, Howdy Dooit, to perfection.

As a kid I watched the Howdy Doody program on TV, and Elder got everything about it right. You have to wonder how many programs he had to sit through making sketches before capturing the genial goofiness of its host, Buffalo Bob, and the entire setting of the show: its Peanut Gallery, and the then-common use of characters, in their show persona, to pitch commercial products.

Years later when Buffalo Bob Smith went on the road to college campuses and was on television with a nostalgic look back at Howdy my primary memory of the show was not his, but the Kurtzman/Elder version.

For the rest of the *Mad* comics run, through issue #22 for Elder, his

NOW YOU KNOW IT AIN'T RIGHT TO SQUIRT SELTZER, CLARABELLA!
...ESPECIALLY TO SQUIRT SELTZER ON TELEVISION!
ESPECIALLY TO SQUIRT SELTZER ON THIS TYPE PROGRAM!
...AND MAINLY ESPECIALLY TO SQUIRT SELTZER ON SCOTCH!
BEEP! BEEP!
EXCUSE ME AGAIN KIDS. BUT I WANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT PHUD CEREAL FLAKES! PHUD CEREAL FLAKES DON'T SNAP, CRACKLE OR POP! PHUD JUST LAYS THERE IN THE BOWL IN ONE SOGGY MESS!... NOW KIDS, LET ME SUGGEST HOW YOU CAN GET YOUR MOM TO BUY PHUD!
PHUD
THE BREAKFAST OF CHIMPANZEES
~ALSO A M LO DETERGANT

*HOWDY DOOIT from Mad #18. Yes, howdiddy dooit? Elder shows his expertise at caricature.*

chief contributions were, as they were with *Panic*, satires of popular comic strips. "Mickey Rodent" in *Mad* #19 has been cited often as an excellent example of Elder's skills at parody and mimicry. The "Disneyland" program was about to premiere on television to coincide with the opening of the Disneyland theme park in California, and that got a lot of press that obscured that fact that Disney's short cartoon unit had already shut down when "Mickey Rodent" was drawn. From the look of Elder's artwork, the popular and multi-million selling Disney comic books from Dell had as much influence on the parody as any movie cartoon.

Late 1954 was a tough time for EC, as those forces that I spoke of earlier had done their work on the character assassination of comic books, and Bill Gaines was especially hard hit by the criticism. Gaines had decided not to go with the new Comics Code, which was primarily pushed by John Goldwater of Archie Comics. The Code seemed stacked against Gaines, with its prohibition of words like "weird," "terror," and "horror." Gaines' jab at Archie Comics through the trenchant satire of Kurtzman and Elder may have fueled the fire against him.

By early '55, with his horror, science fiction, *Crime* and *Shock Suspenstories* gone the only part of the New Trend which had survived into the so-called New Direction were *Mad* and *Panic*. By inference it seems that Elder was part of what was propping up EC as a company.

*Mad* #20 produced a strip which has lived on in reprint form, first of all through the paperback reprints, and then with the first issue of *More Trash From Mad* in 1958, where it was reproduced on slick cover paper stock with vibrant colors, as one of the classics of the latter days of the *Mad* comic book. "The Katchandhammer Kids," a satire of one of the very first American comic strips from the 1890s, in its turn inspired by a German series of illustrated morality tales called *Max und Moritz* by Busch (one of these strips was printed in *Mad* #29). This strip existed in simultaneous separate forms as "The Katzenjammer Kids," and "The Captain and the Kids," owing to a landmark copyright case, and so most readers would know the strip from one or the other version.

The premise was simple: The kids are at war with the Captain, who punishes them in a variety of slapstick ways. Kurtzman captured the slapstick part of the strip very well, but he also did the dialogue in a way that makes it unique, a kind of pseudo-German that at first glance appears to be the language, but when read is a form of foreign-sounding English.

HALLO, KAPTAIN! IST DU STILL GEHOLDEN DER WIRE?
JA! ICH BEEN STILL GEHOLDEN DER WIRE! ICH BEEN GEHOLDEN DER DUM-BOOZLED WIRE FOR DER LASTEN ½ HOUR!
...DANGER-SCHEEN FUR HOLDEN DER WIRE GUTEN-BYE!
STOP! LISTEN!
ICH HORT GE-FIGURED THEY HORT GEBBEN UP ZU MONKEY BUSINESS...
DANKERSHOEN INSPEKTOR! ICH WILLT GETEACHEN DEM FUR MACHEN MIR HOLDEN DEE WIRE FUR ½ HOUR! ICH LI. WHALE DER TAIL AUS FROM DEM!
SLEP! SMESH! ZETZ!

This has been done before many times. Several humor books have used this fake German, but nothing had been done before with the unblinking and savagely satirical eyes of Kurtzman and Elder. Elder, back with his beloved #3 brush and his *tzatzkhelach* pushed the parody into new levels of comic absurdities.

Around this time *Mad* as a comic book was winding down. It's obvious in the last few issues that Kurtzman's mind was elsewhere. Although there isn't anything wrong with the strips in the last few issues, they just don't jump out and grab you like the earlier work. Maybe it was the relentless pace, because Elder was still busy with *Panic*. He had done some very well-drawn satires of Rex Morgan, Mary Worth and Captain Easy, but it was in the strip "Sunday at the Beach" in *Panic* #11, especially compared with "Restaurant" from *Mad*, that showed that Elder was cutting a few corners. Although it probably could have been another "Restaurant," gone are the massive crowd scenes. Instead the background, when crowds are shown, is a half heartedly drawn group at best.

*Mad* #22 was a "Special Art Issue;" a book-length gag story of Elder's life, with examples of his artwork. "Hole" is reprinted from *Mad* #2, but it's the toned artwork of the full-page ads ("Puntiac," "Potgold Beer," etc.) that is the harbinger of what is to come with *Mad* when it would evolve into its magazine format. Kurtzman, who you will remember couldn't stand still creatively, tried a very different way of producing a comic book, by using photos and color surprints. As with all experimental formats it has its weak moments, but generally speaking is a success, and must have led to Gaines knowing that a new format in magazine size would work.

Elder's last two jobs in the New Trend comic books were "Charlie Chinless" and "The Heartaches of Joliet's Groans" in the last issue of *Panic*, cover dated Dec. '55-Jan. '56, and was published after the first issues of *Mad* in its new format were on the stands. "Charlie Chinless," while very funny with its endless string of one-liners, still comical although probably borrowed from *Captain Billy's Whiz Bang*, *Joe Miller's Joke Book* or some other antique source of gags, was drawn in a relatively straight style. "Joliet's Groans" is done in a very good imitation of Stan Drake's high-fashion, illustrative style. Had Elder drawn in this style when he did his short stints in the horror and science fiction books maybe we'd be looking at those stories differently today.

It's obvious, though, that he was busy with the new *Mad*, and the combination of that and the suffocating censorship of the Comics Code, which Gaines had reluctantly joined after a distributors' boycott of his comic book line, probably conspired to end his career in comic books.

It's probably just as well. The industry at that point was not only anemic, it was a lurching corpse, not unlike Ghastly Ingels' horrifying apparitions in the now forbidden horror comics.

Elder went on to work with Kurtzman at *Trump*, *Humbug*, *Help!* and *Playboy*, with the team's long-time association with Hefner and the lavish production of the "Little Annie Fanny" strip. In the mid-'80s, with some fences mended between Gaines and Kurtzman, the Elder/Kurtzman team even showed up at *Mad* again, coming full circle in their careers.

Eddie Hunter, the Elder fan mentioned at the beginning of this article, remembers personal experiences with Elder. As a teenager he had written a fan letter to Elder, who sent him a drawing which Hunter described as "a Reggie-type pulling the wings off flies." While Eddie was in the Navy during the 1960s it disappeared from the wall of his room, and he has regretted its loss since. In 1993 he contacted Elder again, now in retirement, who sent him an ink and watercolor illustration of Little Annie Fanny. I saw the illustration. Some of the ink line had lost a little firmness, and that may be because Elder doesn't draw much

anymore, but it still had elements of what made Elder tops in his field for over 40 years.

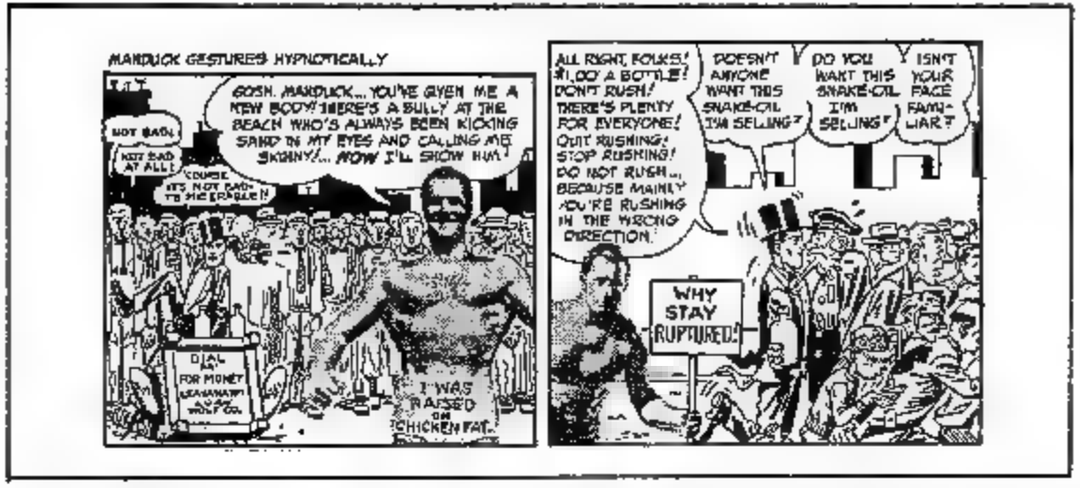
Sometime after Feldstein took over *Mad*, when the names Kurtzman, Elder, Wood and Davis started disappearing from newer editions of the *Mad* paperback reprints, Don Martin was hired to draw and write pages for *Mad*. He was audaciously called "*Mad*'s Maddest Artist!" He was certainly unique, interesting and entertaining, but he could never be *Mad*'s maddest. That place is reserved in the minds of the people who remember the *Mad* comic books for Bill—now Will—Elder. Master of parody, master of *tzatzkelach*. Truly the man who would exemplify "*Mad*'s Maddest Artist."

It was the late Harvey Kurtzman, though, the great editor, cartoonist, satirist and creator, who had the most succinct assessment of Elder. When asked how Elder would have done on a particular job for *Mad*, Kurtzman replied, almost offhandedly, "Willie would have done a good job . . . Willie was our number one cartoonist."

Then and now.

—Par Holman, 10/94-1/95

AT FIRST WHEN THE CHIEF SENT US ON STAKE-OUT... WE RAN TO A RESTAURANT!... WE THOUGHT HE MEANT STEAK-OUT
VIL-LEE!
GREEN HORNET
JACK MOT


MANDUCK GESTURES HYPNOTICALLY
NOT BAD!
NOT BAD AT ALL!
COURSE, IT'S NOT EASY TO BE EDIBLE!
GOSH, MANDUCK... YOU'VE GIVEN ME A NEW BODY! THERE'S A BULLY AT THE BEACH WHO'S ALWAYS BEEN KICKING SAND IN MY EYES AND CALLING ME SKINNY!... NOW I'LL SHOW HIM!
I WAS RAISED ON CHICKEN FAT.
ALL RIGHT, FOLKS! I'LL DO A BOTTLE! DON'T RUSH! THERE'S PLENTY FOR EVERYONE! QUIT RUSHING! STOP RUSHING! DO NOT RUSH... BECAUSE MAINLY YOU'RE RUSHING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.
DOESN'T ANYONE WANT THIS SNAKE-OIL I'M SELLING?
DO YOU WANT THIS SNAKE-OIL I'M SELLING?
ISN'T YOUR FACE FAMILIAR?
WHY STAY RUPTURED?

1. There are more modern comic book swamp creatures, most notably Swamp Thing and Man-Thing, who both owe their existences to Theodore Sturgeon. They also owe more than a passing nod to both Heaps...Airboy's, and Kurtzman/Elder's.

2. An Elder panel which caused more distributor problems with this troubled issue is in the framing device. Panel 2 of page 1 has a typical Elder sign on the creaking door which proclaims "nice, clean, fat errand boy wanted." According to Gaines the distributors interpreted this as an advertisement for homosexuality.

3. This kind of exact duplication of the real product wasn't practiced by the other *Mad* artists up to this point, even in their parodies of popular strips. In "Superduperman" Woody didn't try to draw Superman as he was known to readers from the Wayne Boring version, nor Captain Marbles from C. C. Beck's Captain Marvel. It was a version calculated to call the original to mind without actually showing the original.

It was a Wood/Kurtzman character, not DC's. It's said that DC Comics squawked about *Mad*'s version of Superman, but the parody was fair usage, and in light of the demented but nearly exact Archie from Elder, seems that DC had no grounds for complaint at all about the presentation. The character obviously wasn't theirs

4 Menville begins his editorial comments on the story by saying, "Occasionally, an EC artist would be assigned a story totally unsuited to his style, and the result was inevitably disappointing." Which leads me to the question, why reprint this story then? Menville also makes one error of fact by saying that this was Elder's only solo horror story, missing out on "Last Laugh" completely.

5. The only reason I have to suspect it may be Mendelsohn is because of a piece of writing I have from a *Mad* imitator, *Lunaticide*, published in 1956, credited to Mendelsohn. The piece, a satire on how horror comics came to be, is very unfunny and not very well written. Not even the illustrations by comics great Lee Elias can save it. Jack Mendelsohn later did a strip in the late '50s called "Jacky's Diary".

Elder's style of jokes, rich in puns and wordplay, figure prominently in strips like "Rx Migrane," "Mary Worthless," and "Charlie Chinless," which leads me to believe that Elder was the author of those particular stories.

*TWO SPLASH PANELS: Mixing the surreal in with the real, "Shermlock Shomes," Mad #7; "Frank N. Stein," Mad #8.*

# WILL ELDER IN THE EC NEW TREND

## AN INDEX

By Par Holman

I'm basing this index on a careful perusal of all of the New Trend hardbound EC volumes reprinted by Russ Cochran. Naturally, there will be things left out, because I'm also cross-referencing paperback book reprints, and *Nostalgic Mad* reprints from the 1970s. I would appreciate information on anything I've inadvertently left out.

Notes on the index:

- * indicates lead story that issue
- @ indicates cover
- *NM* indicates *The Nostalgic Mad* comic book reprints done for *Mad* Specials in the 1970s.
- *Mad* paperback and hardbound reprints will be listed by keyword in title only: i.e., *Bedside, Utterly, Inside, For Keeps,* etc.
- EC and Kurtzman had the annoying habit of using exclamation points after story titles. I've dropped them for the sake of continuity and my sanity.

| Issue # | Story title | Pages | Reprint |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **CRIME SUSPENSTORIES** | | |
| 17 | ...Two for the Show (last panel by Kamen) | 7 | |
| 18 | Juice for the Record | 7 | |
| | **FRONTLINE COMBAT** (All stories inks only over Severin pencils) | | |
| 2 | Zero Hour | 7 | |
| 3 | How They Die | 7 | |
| 4 | Bomb Run | 7 | |
| 5 | 442nd Combat Team | 8* | |
| 6 | A Platoon | 8* | |
| 7 | The Landing | 8 | |
| 8 | Night Patrol | 7 | |
| 9 | First Shot | 7 | |
| 10@ | Geronimo | 7 | |
| 11 | Bird-dogs | 8* | |
| | **HAUNT OF FEAR** (Inks only over Kamen pencils) | | |
| 21 | Corker | 6 | |
| | **MAD** | | |
| 1 | Ganefs | 6 | *Son of* |
| 2 | Mole | 7 | *NM 6@* |
| 3 | Dragged Net (non-TV version) | 8* | *For Keeps* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Shadow | 7 | *Brothers* |
| 5@ | Outer Sanctum | 8* | *Bedside, NM 1* |
| 6 | Ping Pong | 7 | *Strikes Back, NM 2* |
| 7 | Shermlock Shomes | 8* | *Inside, NM 4* |
| 8 | Frank N. Stein | 8* | *Utterly, NM 3* |
| 9 | The Raven | 7 | *Bedside, NM 6* |
| 10 | Woman Wonder | 7 | *Brothers, NM 5* |
| 11 | Dragged Net (TV version) | 7 | *Reader* |
| 12 | Starchie | 8* | *Reader, NM 4* |
| 13 | Robinson Crusoe | 7 | *Bedside, NM 7* |
| 14 | Manduck the Magician | 8* | *Strikes Back* |
| 15 | Gasoline Valley | 8* | *Reader, NM 8* |
| 16 | Shermlock Holmes in the Hound of the Basketballs | 8* | *Brothers* |
| | Restaurant | 6 | *Bedside, NM 7* |
| 17 | Bringing Back Father (w/Bernie Krigstein) | 5* | |
| 18 | Howdy Dooit | 7 | *Inside* |
| 19 | Mickey Rodent | 7* | *Inside* |
| | Puzzle Pages | 5 | *Inside* |
| 20 | Katchandhammer Kids | 8* | *Inside, Trash* (No #) |
| 21 | Poopeye | 8* | *Strikes Back, NM 8* |
| | Comic Book Ads | 5 | |
| 22 | "Special Art Issue" (reprints "Mole" from *Mad* #2, 4 pages of ad parodies, and selected panels within the body of the issue.) | | |

**PANIC**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Night Before Christmas (Banned in Boston) | 7 |
| 2 | Lady Or the Tiger? (1-panel Wolverton) | 7 |
| 3 | Li'l Melvin (repeats Wolverton paste-up) | 7* |
| 4 | Smiddy | 7* |
| 5 | Tick Dracy | 8* |
| 6 | Phansom | 6* |
| 7 | Mel Padooka | 7* |
| 8 | Irving Oops | 7* |
| 9 | Rx Migrane MD (first Comics Code issue) | 7* |
| 10 | Capt Izzy and Washt Upps | 7* |
| | Punch Lines | 6 |
| 11 | Mary Worthless | 7* |
| | Sunday At the Beach | 6 |
| 12 | Charlie Chinless | 7* |
| | Heartaches of Joliet's Groans | 6 |

**TALES FROM THE CRYPT**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 37 | Strop! You're Killing Me! | 6 | *Horror Comics/1950s* |
| 38 | Last Laugh | 6 | |

**TWO-FISTED TALES**

(All stories inks only over Severin pencils)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19 | War Story | 7* |
| 20 | Massacred | 8* |
| 21 | Pigs Of the Roman Empire | 7 |
| 22 | Chicken | 7 |
| 23 | Dog Fight | 7 |
| 24 | Weak Link | 7 |
| 25 | Buzz Bomb | 7 |
| 26 | Link Up | 6 |
| 27 | Luck | 8* |
| 28 | Checkers | 8* |
| 29 | Washington | 6 |
| 31 | Campaign | 8 |
| 36 | Dangerous Man | 7 |

**WEIRD FANTASY**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | Ahead Of the Game | 7 | |
| 18 | Counter-Clockwise (Severin pencils) | 8 | |
| 19 | King Of the Gray Spaces (Severin pencils) | 8 | *Tomorrow Midnight* |
| 20 | ...For Us the Living (Severin pencils) | 8 | |
| 21 | The Million Year Picnic (Severin pencils) | 7 | |

**WEIRD SCIENCE**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 14 | Inside Story (first solo EC story?) | 7 |
| 19 | Right On the Button (panels printed in *Seduction Of the Innocent*) | 6 |

Additional notes: *Mad* reprint volumes (first editions listed) which reprinted Elder's comic book work were:

*The Mad Reader*, Ballantine, 1954
*Mad Strikes Back*, Ballantine, May, 1955
*Inside Mad*, Ballantine, November, 1955
*Utterly Mad*, Ballantine, October, 1956
*The Brothers Mad*, Ballantine, October, 1958
*The Bedside Mad*, Signet, 1959
*Son of Mad*, Signet, October, 1959

*Mad For Keeps*, Crown Publishers, 1958. Hardbound reprint volume.

*More Trash From Mad*, no number, 1958. The first *Mad* annual.

*Nostalgic Mad*, Comic book format, in color. 8 issues annually from 1972-1980. Originally appeared as extras in *Mad Special* 9 (*NM* 1), 12 (*NM* 2), 15 (*NM* 3), 18 (*NM* 4), 21 (*NM* 5), 24 (*NM* 6), 28 (*NM* 7), 32 (*NM* 8)

*Tomorrow Midnight*, paperback book, Ballantine, June, 1966. Reprints Ray Bradbury science fiction stories from EC.

*Horror Comics Of the 1950's*, hardbound, Nostalgia Press, 1971.

·Russ Cochran has done a lot of reprinting of the EC line in the last few years. His most ambitious project was the complete reprinting of the EC comic books in large-size, Smythe-sewn, hardbound editions, slipcased in a deluxe format for collectors. These are, in alphabetical order:

*The Complete Crime Suspenstories*, 1983
*The Complete Frontline Combat*, 1982
*The Complete Haunt of Fear*, 1985
*The Complete Mad*, 1986 (printed in both black and white and color editions. In addition, a softcover version of the first volume of the set printing *Mad* #1-6 was published in color.)
*The Complete Panic*, 1984
*The Complete Tales From the Crypt*, 1979
*The Complete Two-Fisted Tales*, 1980
*The Complete Vault of Horror*, 1982
*The Complete Weird Fantasy*, 1980
*The Complete Weird Science*, (no date, 1978?)

·Russ published a line of 9"x12" four-color editions of various EC titles under the umbrella title *EC Classics*. Elder's work appeared in:

*EC Classics* #1, August, 1985. Reprints "Strop! You're Killing Me!" from *Tales From the Crypt* #37.

*EC Classics* #3, October, 1985. Reprints "First Shot" from *Frontline Combat* #9, and "Campaign" from *Two-Fisted Tales* #32. (Severin pencils, Elder inks.)

*EC Classics* #5, February, 1986. Reprints "Ahead of the Game" from *Weird Fantasy* #17.

*EC Classics* #8, 1986. Reprints "Two for the Show" from *Crime Suspenstories* #17 and "Juice For the Record" from *Crime Suspenstories* #18.

*EC Classics* #10, 1987. Reprints "The Night Before Christmas" from *Panic* #1 and "The Lady Or the Tiger?" from *Panic* #2.

·There have been several attempts to reprint the EC comics for newsstand sales, of which some have Elder work reprinted:

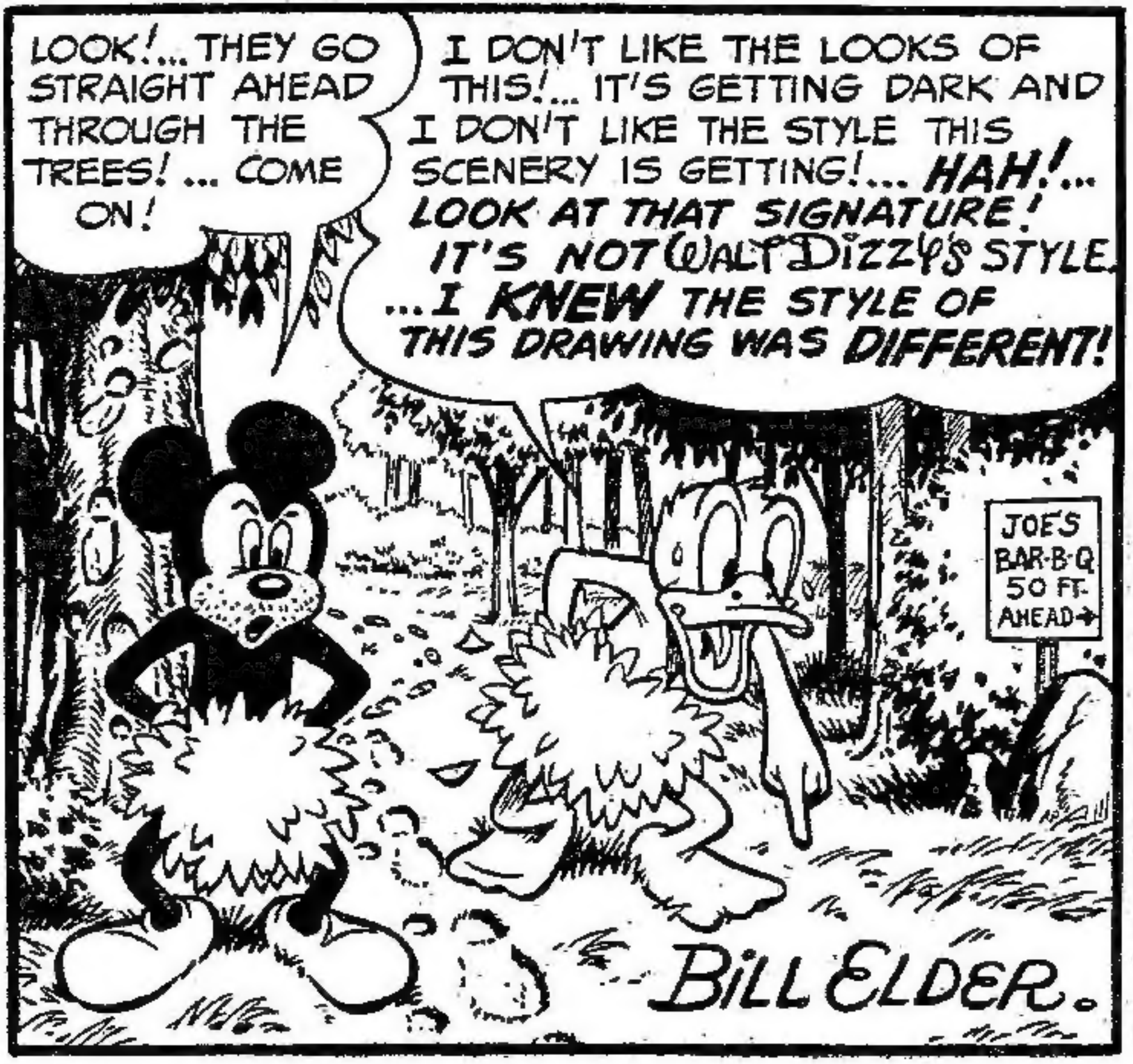
*Tales From the Crypt* #1, Gladstone, 64 pages, July, 1990. Reprints "Two For the Show" from *Crime Suspenstories* #17.

*Weird Science* #2, Gladstone, 64 pages, Nov., 1990. Reprints "Ahead of the Game" from *Weird Fantasy* #17.

*Haunt of Fear* #3, Russ Cochran, 64 pages, Jan., 1992. Reprints "Counter-Clockwise" from *Weird Fantasy* #18.

*Tales From the Crypt* #4, Russ Cochran, 64 pages, Feb., 1992. Reprints "Juice for the Record" from *Crime Suspenstories* #18.

·Cochran also publishes an on-going series of EC reprints in chronological order of the 32-page New Trend EC comic book line minus *Frontline Combat*, *Panic* and *Mad*. The issues which would contain Elder's work will be numbered the same as the original EC issues in which they appeared in the 1950s. *Frontline Combat* is slated to be reprinted beginning in 1995. There are no plans known at this time for *Panic* or *Mad*.


LOOK!... THEY GO STRAIGHT AHEAD THROUGH THE TREES! ... COME ON!
I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS!... IT'S GETTING DARK AND I DON'T LIKE THE STYLE THIS SCENERY IS GETTING!... HAH!... LOOK AT THAT SIGNATURE! IT'S NOT WALT DIZZY'S STYLE. ...I KNEW THE STYLE OF THIS DRAWING WAS DIFFERENT!
JOE'S BAR-B-Q 50 FT. AHEAD
BILL ELDER.

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ITS MELVIN!

SPECIAL ALL-ELDER ISSUE!